

Council 4 AFSCME Testimony – Appropriations Committee – 7/24/12

Opposition to 1115 Waiver

Good afternoon Chairman Harp, Chairman Walker and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Brian Anderson. I am a lobbyist for Council 4 AFSCME, a union of 35,000 public and nonprofit employees, including many of the state workers at the Department of Social Services, Department of Children and Families and in nonprofit human services agencies

Council 4 is testifying in opposition to the Department of Social Services 1115 waiver to restrict eligibility to Husky D clients. Many of the people receiving DSS aid are unemployed, working poor or living on extremely thin incomes. Dropping these folks from state health coverage may cost taxpayers more money down the line, when the ailments that might have been prevented become full-blown problems. Prevention is much cheaper in the long run.

Much damage was done to DSS and its clients during the last twenty years. Governor Rowland slashed DSS staff to the bone in 2003. Governor Rell did not fill funded but vacant staff positions. This staff serves as the bridge between poor families and the services they need. The staff is in bad need of restoration. Eligibility worker caseloads for services such as Foodstamps and Medicaid have been as high as 1700 cases per according to DSS data; when they should be significantly lower (no more than 400).

For the first time in twenty years we feel that there is now an administration that actually cares about making DSS function properly. Governor Malloy and Commissioner Bremby have been working to turn DSS around. We know that the administration has been swimming upstream in these difficult economic times. We understand the need to cut costs wherever possible. However, we believe that it is not possible to cut costs to the degree stated in this waiver, or with this vulnerable population. Considering the heavy burden already borne by DSS staff, we believe that it will be difficult for them to take on this additional redetermination task.

We urge the administration and the legislature to revisit this waiver and see if better solutions cannot be found. Connecticut has a proud history, going back more than 350 years, of caring for the least of our brothers and sisters. Let's not turn our backs on that history.

Every step necessary should be taken to avoid cutting services for poor people and cutting assistance to working families trying to access health care. Our richest citizens and successful corporations have received immense tax cuts from the federal and state government in the past few years and could stand to contribute a portion of that in taxes for the common good. Economists and other experts all agree that in a time of recession and economic crisis, we need to strengthen public services and expand the middle class by investing in programs and people. We cannot cut our way out of this crisis.

Thank you for your consideration.